By Faramarz Tabesh

Marriage with First-Degree Relatives in Ancient Iran: A Historical Reassessment of a Prevailing Claim

A Documented Historical Research Aimed at Clarifying Historical Ambiguities and Allegations Regarding the National and Ancient Identity of the Land of Iran

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Author: Faramarz Tabesh
ISNI (Author): 0000 0005 2737 2290

Affiliation: Founder and Director, Research Institute Andishe Online Germany (AOG)
ISNI (Institution): 0000 0005 2724 714X | Ringgold ID: 823032

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Marriage with First-Degree Relatives in Ancient Iran: A Historical Reassessment of a Prevailing Claim

"Within academic institutions, a historical claim is assessed through the presentation of credible evidence, not through propaganda driven by religious supremacism. For this claim put forward by extremist Muslims, there exists not a single historical document. It must be noted: the path to legitimizing a religion does not lie in delegitimizing other religions—especially not without the presentation of reliable evidence."

Abstract

The claim that marriage with first-degree relatives—including unions such as mother–son or sister–brother—was widespread and socially accepted in ancient Iran is among the most recurrent allegations raised in **post-Islamic polemical literature**[1] against Zoroastrianism and the culture of ancient Iran [1][2]. These claims are not based on reliable evidence, contemporaneous historical documentation, or archaeological data; rather, they are largely constructed from late reports, ideological interpretations, and misreadings of theological concepts found in Middle Persian texts [3][4].

Relying on an analysis of Pahlavi texts, an examination of the conditions under which these texts were transmitted and rewritten in the post-Sasanian period, and an evaluation of authoritative research in Iranian studies and Zoroastrian scholarship, this article demonstrates that the allegation lacks historical credibility. Rather than reflecting the social realities of ancient Iran, it is primarily the product of ideological polemics and efforts aimed at denigrating Iranian culture [5][6]. The article further argues that the possibility of selective omission or reduction of these texts during the period of Arab domination cannot be dismissed as implausible [7][8].

1. Introduction

One of the fundamental principles in the historiography of religions is the distinction between theological and idealized propositions, on the one hand, and actual social practices, on the other. The neglect of this distinction—**particularly in polemical texts**[2]—has consistently led to unwarranted generalizations and moral accusations. The claim of *"marriage with close relatives in ancient Iran"* represents a salient example of such a methodological error [9].

This claim is based almost entirely on the interpretation of a single term found in late Pahlavi texts: **xwēdōdah**[3] [10]. In what follows, this concept, along with its historical and textual context, is subjected to critical examination.

2. The Concept of xwēdōdah in Pahlavi Texts

The primary basis of this allegation is the term **xwēdōdah** as it appears in certain late Pahlavi texts, which is literally translated as "marriage with kin." Even under the most optimistic assumption—that is, assuming the absence of deliberate editorial manipulation or ideological distortion in these texts—a close examination of the concept demonstrates the following:

1. This term does not appear explicitly or clearly in the **ancient Avestan texts**[4] [11].
2. Its usage in late Pahlavi texts is predominantly theological and theoretical in nature, referring to an idealized model rather than a widely practiced social norm [12].
3. There exists no independent evidence in contemporaneous legal, social, or administrative documents attesting to its practical implementation [13].

Shaul Shaked[5] explicitly states that **xwēdōdah**, rather than reflecting social reality, constitutes a theoretical concept within the framework of late Zoroastrian theology (Shaked, 1987) [14]. Accordingly, interpreting this concept as a report of prevalent social behavior lacks scholarly foundation [15].

3. Distortion, Rewriting, and Transmission of Religious Texts under Conditions of Domination: Methodological Considerations Regarding Late Pahlavi Texts

3.1 Legal and Social Pressure and Political–Religious Hostility

One of the imprecise assumptions present in part of the scholarship on ancient Iran is the treatment of **late Pahlavi texts**[6] as direct, transparent, and unmediated reflections of the religious and social traditions of pre-Islamic Iran [16]. This assumption is not only unsupported by documentary evidence but also appears incompatible with the most basic principles of historical textual criticism [17]. The fact remains that no independent evidence is available to demonstrate under what conditions, by whom, and with what degree of autonomy or political–religious pressure the extant versions of Pahlavi texts were compiled or rewritten [18].

Following the Arab Muslim conquest of Iran, the institutional structures of the Zoroastrian religion—including the priestly educational system, centers for the production and preservation of texts, and libraries affiliated with the Sasanian state—rapidly collapsed at the hands of the Muslim Arabs [19]. The destruction of a substantial portion of the written heritage of ancient Iran is a reality reflected even in **Islamic narratives**[7] and has not been seriously questioned by contemporary scholars. Consequently, the Pahlavi texts available to us today represent only scattered remnants of a far more extensive tradition, the greater part of which has been lost [20].

Under such circumstances, the assumption of the complete independence of the process by which Pahlavi texts were rewritten in the post-Sasanian period remains unproven and simplistic. Zoroastrians during this historical period constituted a politically powerless, defeated minority, subject to legal and social pressure and exposed to the religious hostility of the dominant system, namely that of the Muslim Arabs [21]. **Comparative history of religions**[8] demonstrates that in such contexts, shifts in

tone, doctrinal moderation, self-censorship, and even the reconfiguration of religious concepts are common and to be expected phenomena [22]. Accordingly, the possibility of distortion or ideologically driven modification of certain concepts in late Pahlavi texts cannot be categorically dismissed.

3.2- Ideological Misuse of Compromised Texts

The concept of **xwēdōdah**, as presented in certain late Pahlavi texts, constitutes a salient example of the ideological misuse of texts that were transmitted under conditions of pressure and historical rupture [23]. Even if one accepts that this concept appears in some sources, there exists no independent evidence confirming it as a common social practice in pre-Islamic Iran [24].

Nevertheless, later Muslim historians and theologians, by detaching this concept from its theological and theoretical context and by disregarding the conditions under which the texts were transmitted and rewritten, employed **xwēdōdah** as a basis for attributing morally reprehensible behaviors to the peoples of ancient Iran [25]. This process represents not merely a simple interpretive error, but rather forms part of a broader tradition of delegitimizing defeated religions within Islamic history [26].

When it is taken into account that the extant Pahlavi texts are the product of a fragmented, incomplete tradition that was potentially shaped under conditions of pressure, any attempt to draw social generalizations on the basis of isolated theological concepts is fundamentally devoid of scholarly validity [27]. Within this framework, the claim of the "prevalence of marriage with close relatives in ancient Iran" emerges not as the result of historical research, but as a reflection of a project aimed at the denigration and degradation of Iran's ancient culture [28].

3.3- Fabrication, Content Inversion, and Destruction: A Recurrent Pattern of Delegitimizing Non-Islamic Religions

Historical experience demonstrates that the fabrication, distortion, and rewriting of religious texts for the purpose of delegitimizing rival religions constitutes a practice with a long-standing precedent within the tradition of political and ideological Islam [29]. The fabrication of texts—such as the presentation of the **Gospel of Barnabas**[9], in which the coming of a prophet named *"Muhammad"* (or "Ahmad") is explicitly foretold on multiple occasions—represents a clear and indisputable example of this tradition of forgery and falsification [30]. This gospel has been identified as forged and inauthentic by all Christian communities, as well as by non-Christian figures such as **Shabir Ally**[10], authors affiliated with **SeekersGuidance**[11], and **scholars of biblical studies**[12] [30A].

3.4- Another instance of content inversion in the opposite direction can be observed in: Systematic Examples of Ideologically Driven Distortion in English Translations of the Qur'an from Arabic [30B]

This section examines recurrent patterns of semantic distortion in widely used English translations of the Qur'an—patterns whose shared characteristic is the prioritization of ideological considerations and modern Western moral frameworks over fidelity to the Arabic source text. In translation studies, this approach is classified under the concept of **manipulative translation**, or *"biased translation"* [B1].

3.4.1- Softening Explicit Imperative Verbs and the Removal of Physical Connotations [B2]

In some modern translations and rereadings of the Qur'an—particularly within reformist works—imperative verbs with concrete and physical connotations are deliberately reinterpreted as non-violent concepts.

A representative example:

- «وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ» (Qur'an 4:34)
- Modern translations: *leave them*, *separate from them*, *go away from them*

In Classical Arabic, the verb «ضَرَبَ»—in the absence of a metaphorical indicator—denotes physical striking (Lane, 1863; al-Ṭabarī, ca. 950 CE; al-Qurṭubī, 1372 AH). Translators such as **Laleh Bakhtiar (2007)** have consciously set aside this physical connotation and characterized their rendering as an "ethical interpretation" rather than a literal translation [B3].

3.4.2- Reinterpretation of Jihād-Related Verbs: «قَاتِلُوا» → *strive against* [B4]

The verb «قَاتِلُوا» in Classical Arabic denotes armed combat. Nevertheless, in certain modern reformist translations and writings, it is rendered or interpreted as *strive against* or *struggle against*. This semantic shift is incompatible with the consensus of classical exegetical authorities (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Rāzī) and constitutes an example of the ideological redefinition of the meaning of **qitāl** [B4].

3.4.3- The Addition of Interpretive Qualifications Absent from the Text (Implicit Exegesis) [B5]

One common instrument of distortion is the insertion of explanatory words within brackets.

- Arabic text: «اقْتُلُوهُمْ»
- Translation: Slay them **[in battle]**

The phrase *"in battle"* does not appear in the Arabic text. Its addition transforms an absolute injunction into a conditional one and covertly substitutes interpretation for translation (Venuti, 1995) [B6].

3.4.4- Obscuring Concepts of Slavery and Sexual Ownership [B7]

The expression «ما مَلَكَت أَيمانُكُم» is often rendered in modern translations as *those whom you rightfully possess*. This translation removes the concepts of enslavement and sexual ownership, despite the fact that in classical jurisprudence and exegesis (al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Qudāmah) these implications are explicit and undeniable [B8].

3.4.5- Altering the Meaning of "Fitna" to Moralize Violence [B9]

In verses concerning combat, many classical exegetes interpret «فتنة» as *shirk* (polytheism) and *kufr* (unbelief) (al-Ṭabarī, commentary on al-Baqara 2:193). Modern translations render it as *persecution*, thereby reducing warfare against unbelief to "defense against oppression."

3.4.6- The Pattern of Apologetic Translations [B10]

Translations such as *The Clear Quran* (Mustafa Khattab) exhibit consistent patterns:

- Softening of violence
- Moralization of legal rulings
- Addition of non-existent qualifications
- Harmonization with modern liberal discourse

These differences are not stylistic but strategic and ideological, becoming evident when compared with more literal-oriented translations such as those by **Arberry** and **Pickthall** [B11].

4. Summary of This Section

A systematic examination of English translations of the Qur'an demonstrates that these divergences are not accidental. Rather, they are the result of deliberate decisions aimed at softening, restricting, and redefining Qur'anic rulings. At this stage, translation moves beyond the *"transfer of meaning"* and becomes an ideological rewriting of the text, intended to align it with the sensibilities of a Western audience accustomed to human-rights discourse and to increase the likelihood of its acceptance of the religion [B12].

[30B – Specialized sources concerning distortion in Qur'anic translation are listed in the documentation section]

Summary of Key Findings in Table Format

No.	Concept / Issue	Arabic Term	Description / Example	Source / Reference
1	Softening Explicit Imperative Verbs	وَاضْرِبُوهُنَّ	In some modern reformist translations, imperative verbs with physical connotations are reinterpreted as non-violent; e.g., "leave them", "separate from them", "go away from them". Lane (1863), al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurtubī indicate physical meaning.	B2, B3
2	Reinterpretation of Jihad Verbs	قَاتِلُوا	In Classical Arabic, this verb denotes armed combat. Modern reformist translations render it as "strive against" or "struggle against", contradicting classical exegesis (al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Rāzī).	B4
3	Addition of Interpretive Qualifications	اقْتُلُوهُمْ	Explanatory phrases in brackets (e.g., "[in battle]") added to the text, converting an absolute command into a conditional one and covertly substituting interpretation for translation.	B5, B6
4	Obscuring Slavery and Sexual Ownership	مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ	Modern translations often render as "those whom you rightfully possess," removing slavery and sexual ownership concepts present in classical jurisprudence and exegesis (al-Qurtubī, Ibn Qudāmah).	B7, B8
5	Altering Meaning of "Fitna"	فِتْنَة	Classical exegesis interprets as shirk (polytheism) and kufr (unbelief). Modern translations render as "persecution", reducing warfare against disbelief to defense against harm.	B9

Considering the above, in such a context, it is not surprising that Zoroastrian religious concepts, after the collapse of Ancient Iran's cultural structures, also became tools for denigrating the Iranian people [31]. Transforming an ambiguous, idealized theological concept such as **xwēdōdah** into a claim of common sexual behavior was not the result of historical evidence, but rather the product of a mindset that, from the outset, sought its legitimacy in the denigration of other religions [30B][31].

4.1- Manipulation of the works of Iranian mystics

Just as we observe today the **systematic manipulation and rewriting of works by Iranian mystics**[13] within the framework of contemporary ideological structures in Iran, there is no valid or convincing reason to believe that the religious traditions of subjugated communities in the past were immune to such pressures, distortions, and interventions [32]. Denying this reality does not indicate scientific neutrality but rather reflects a form of historical naivety [32].

4.2- Fabrication of hadiths

A prominent example of this is the production of hundreds, if not thousands, of false Shia **hadith**[14], which appeared in addition to what already existed in Shia literature before the rise of politically assertive Shia Islam in Iran [33]. This process created a deep and lasting schism between **Shia**[15] and Sunni communities [33]. Among these cases is the event that, according to Sunni belief, marks the death of Fatimah, the wife of Ali ibn Abi Talib; however, Shia clerics—especially from the presidency of **Khatami**[16] onward—interpreted it as **martyrdom**[17], added embellishments, created numerous narratives and stories, and then disseminated these accounts to radical, uneducated, and fanatical members of religious assemblies, an action that fueled further anger among **Sunni communities**[18] [33].

4.3- The fabrication of forgeries concerning the Pahlavi dynasty

Another example is the astonishing production of forgeries concerning the **Pahlavi era**[19] aimed at discrediting their image and heritage [34]. These examples clearly demonstrate that whenever and wherever political Islam has gained power, it has resorted to selective alteration of facts to delegitimize the beliefs of others, and even to manipulation of historical texts [34]. Over the centuries, those who—whether out of coercion or for survival—aligned themselves with such regimes, have, beyond self-censorship, sought to implement the desired changes in historical and ancient texts to please the rulers of extremist religious governments [34].

It should be noted that the extant Pahlavi texts have largely reached us in the form of **late and varied manuscripts** [35]. Research indicates that:

- Texts such as the **Dēnkard**[20] and **Mēnōg-ī Xrad**[21], in different versions, exhibit omissions, lexical changes, and structural inconsistencies [36].
- Many of these texts were translated into Arabic and New Persian during the post-Sassanian period under Arab Muslim dominion, a process which increased the possibility of distortion or simplification of concepts [37].
- Some changes likely aimed at religious adaptation according to the preferences of radical Muslim rulers, or even content reversal due to bias, a practice that is methodologically unacceptable from the perspective of historical text criticism [38].

These points make the possibility of distortion or directional alteration of certain concepts, including **xwēdōdah**, entirely plausible [39].

5. Absence of Legal and Social Evidence

One of the fundamental criteria for assessing the prevalence of a social behavior in the ancient world is the examination of legal, judicial, and administrative documents. Regarding Ancient Iran:

- There is no known marriage contract recording unions with first-degree relatives.
- No codified Sassanian law recognizes such relationships as a social norm.
- Texts concerning inheritance, family, and legal responsibilities contain no practical reference to such marriages.

Albert de Jong[22] emphasizes that this widespread silence in legal and social records cannot be considered accidental [40]. Accordingly, leading Zoroastrian scholars, including **Mary Boyce**[23], have

rejected any generalization of the xwēdōdah concept to the entirety of Ancient Iranian society [41]. This perspective is also confirmed in the "*Encyclopaedia Iranica*"[42], which assesses attributing such behavior to the Zoroastrian community as fundamentally incorrect and lacking scholarly validity.

6. Historical Origin of the Accusation and the Role of Islamic Polemical Sources

A historical tracing of this accusation shows that **almost all reports originate from Islamic sources several centuries after the fall of the Sassanids**, including:

- **Al-Masʿūdī**[24], *Murūj al-Dhahab* (10th century CE) [43]
- **Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī**[25], *Āthār al-Bāqiya* (early 11th century CE) [44]
- **Ibn al-Athīr**[26], *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* (12th century CE) [45]

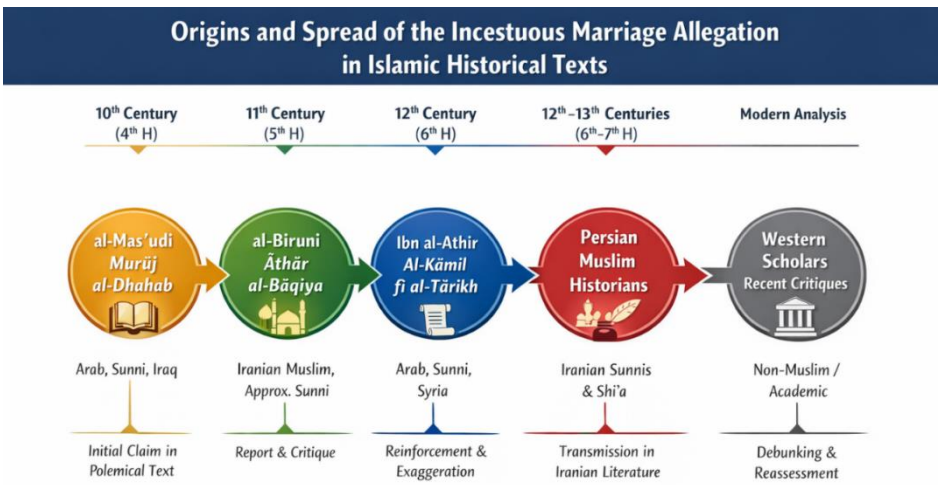
These sources:

- Are not contemporary with the events in question.
- Have a polemical nature.
- Rely on later hearsay and reports, rather than independent evidence.

From this, it can be concluded that the primary origin of these narratives lies among early Arab Sunni writers, and they were subsequently reproduced by Muslim Iranians—both Sunni and Shia. This process, rather than being purely religious, had an ideological character and was anti-Iranian in its cultural intent.

6.1- Timeline Analysis

Timeline Table


Origins and Spread of the Incestuous Marriage Allegation in Islamic Historical Texts
10th Century (4th H)
11th Century (5th H)
12th Century (6th H)
12th–13th Centuries (6th–7th H)
Modern Analysis
al-Mas'udi Murūj al-Dhahab
al-Biruni Āthār al-Bāqiya
Ibn al-Athir Al-Kāmil fi al-Tārikh
Persian Muslim Historians
Western Scholars Recent Critiques
Arab, Sunni, Iraq
Iranian Muslim, Approx. Sunni
Arab, Sunni, Syria
Iranian Sunnis & Shi'a
Non-Muslim / Academic
Initial Claim in Polemical Text
Report & Critique
Reinforcement & Exaggeration
Transmission in Iranian Literature
Debunking & Reassessment

6.1.1- Initial Origin of the Accusation:

Primarily in Arabic Sunni sources from the 10th–12th centuries CE (Al-Masʿūdī, Ibn al-Athīr).
Purpose: To denigrate Ancient Iran and exaggerate the moral differences between Islam and pre-Islamic Iran.

6.1.2- Reproduction by Muslim Iranians:

Muslim Iranians, both Sunni and Shia, rewrote or transmitted these narratives.

Their role was more in transmission and reinforcement than in inventing the accounts. However, it should be noted that this essentially amounts to the widespread dissemination of a baseless rumor, irresponsibly circulated. As examined in earlier sections of this article, content reversal, addition of explanations, and manipulations in the rewriting of Pahlavi texts—aimed at aligning the writings with the views of the ruling Arabs and thereby denigrating Ancient Iranians—were entirely plausible.

6.1.3- No Direct Connection to Contemporary Religious Branches:

As far as my research allows, this accusation is a historical and ideological product of the medieval period, and aside from its rewriting and dissemination, it has no relation to Shia or Sunni textual productions of that era.

This means that its origin should be traced to the works of early Arab Sunni writers, or those under their influence, in the early Islamic centuries. Meanwhile, Muslim Iranians, both Sunni and Shia, republished these baseless and fundamentally incorrect accounts with the aim of diminishing Ancient Iranians and Zoroastrianism.

7. Final Conclusion

An examination of Pahlavi texts, the historical conditions of their transmission—particularly the state of overt hostility of Muslim Arabs toward Iranians—the absence of legal and social evidence, and the evaluation of credible contemporary scholarship clearly demonstrate that the claim of the “normal prevalence of marriage with first-degree relatives in ancient Iran” lacks any historical foundation [46]. As noted throughout the article, this accusation does not reflect social reality; rather, it is the product of misinterpretations, ideological polemics, and efforts aimed at humiliating the culture and religion of pre-Islamic Iranians [47].

From the perspective of **modern historiographical methodology**[27], such a claim must be regarded as an unscientific distortion devoid of scholarly credibility [48].

As analyzed above, the reality is that there exists the possibility that early Pahlavi texts underwent conceptually directed alterations and selective omissions in later rewritings [49]. Considering that most Zoroastrian texts (for example, *Dēnkard*, *Mēnōg-ī Xrad*, *Bundahišn*) that discuss the subject of ***xwēdōdah*** were completed or rewritten in the 7th–10th centuries CE—namely after the fall of the Sasanian Empire and the Arab domination of Iranian lands—and taking into account scholarly assessments and the hostility and humiliating treatment of Iranians by Arabs, including book burnings and the destruction of Iran's ancient heritage, and also in light of modern psychological perspectives on the reactions of subordinates under the rule of non-Iranian, authoritarian, and extremist rulers—such as mechanisms of obedience, self-censorship, forced adaptation, and cognitive restructuring—it can be concluded that the rewriting, modification, or even distortion of certain religious and cultural concepts in the transmitted post-Sasanian texts was not an exceptional occurrence, but rather an expected reaction under conditions of domination and structural pressure [50].

Therefore, with a very high degree of probability approaching certainty, and based on a careful examination of the term *xwēdōdah* (khwēdōdah), as well as the absence of such a concept in the **Gathas**[28], **the Yasna**[29], and the **Vendidad**[30], and also considering what is known about patterns of social relations throughout all pre-Islamic periods in Iran, it may be stated that [51]:

"In the authentic pre-Islamic Pahlavi sources, what is meant by marriage with relatives is the same practice that is currently common throughout Iran and indeed much of the world: marriage between cousins—sons and daughters of paternal and maternal uncles and aunts. This is a natural practice which, in my view and based on what has been documented throughout this article, was manipulated by anti-Iranian, extremist Arabs in order to serve as a tool for the denigration and humiliation of Zoroastrian culture and philosophy and, more broadly, of ancient Iran. Accordingly, all explanations to this effect found in post-Sasanian texts may likewise be considered unreliable based on the same reasoning."

A research paper by Faramarz Tabesh

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Footnotes

[1] Polemical literature refers to writings or speeches produced with the aim of refuting, attacking, discrediting, or ideologically defending a belief, religion, or group, rather than neutrally reporting historical reality.

[2] Polemical texts are writings created for the purpose of argumentation, rejection, discrediting, or ideological defense of a belief, religion, school of thought, or group, rather than for neutral and descriptive reporting of historical reality.

[3] *Xwēdōdah* is a term found in late Pahlavi texts that, in a theological and idealized sense, refers to "intra-family union" and does not necessarily reflect a common social practice in ancient Iran.

[4] Old Avestan texts: writings in Old Avestan, the sacred language of Zoroastrians, including the Gathas, Yasna, and Vendidad, which constitute the core religious and ritual texts of Zoroastrianism and date back to very early periods of ancient Iran.

[5] Shaul Shaked: an Israeli scholar and prominent Zoroastrian studies expert who has conducted extensive research on Pahlavi texts, Zoroastrian history, and theology, and has offered scholarly and analytical interpretations of concepts such as *xwēdōdah*.

[6] Examples of late Pahlavi texts include:

• **Dēnkard** – a Zoroastrian religious encyclopedia compiled in the post-Sasanian period, summarizing religious and ethical teachings.

• **Mēnōg-ī Xrad** – a philosophical and ethical Pahlavi text discussing reason, the soul, and the proper way of life.

• **Bundahišn** – a Zoroastrian cosmological and mythological text addressing the creation of the world and humanity.

• All of these texts were rewritten after the fall of the Sasanian Empire and may contain modifications adapted to conditions following the Arab conquest of Iran.

[7]Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh* – refers to the collapse of state institutions and the destruction of Zoroastrian libraries and religious centers following the conquest of Iran.

Al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab* – mentions the looting and transfer of books and scientific works of ancient Iran by the Arab conquerors.

Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Āthār al-Bāqiya ʿan al-Qurūn al-Khāliya* – refers to the alteration and loss of portions of Iran's pre-Islamic religious and cultural texts, indicating that part of Iran's written heritage gradually disappeared after the conquest.

[8] Comparative study of the history and development of different religions.

[9] *The Gospel of Barnabas*: a non-canonical text about the life and teachings of Jesus, differing from the New Testament Gospels. The prevailing view is that this gospel was forged by Muslims.

[10] A contemporary Christian priest and missionary from Pakistan, non-Arab.

[11] An international Islamic educational institution providing free religious education, headquartered in Canada.

[12] Biblical scholars such as Bart Ehrman and Raymond Brown.

[13] See the article *"Iranshahr: The Land of the Civilized Aryan Kingdom"* — section "Final Aging Conclusion."

[14] The sayings, actions, or approvals of the Prophet of Islam, which constitute a major source of Islamic jurisprudence and knowledge; this also includes Muhammad's early supporters.

[15] Refers to the followers of ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib.

[16] Mohammad Khatami: former President of Iran (1997–2005) and a prominent figure of the so-called reformist movement.

[17] Martyrdom (according to Professor Nourollah Elahi): the conscious sacrifice of one's life in the pursuit of truth and spiritual perfection, emphasizing intention, ethics, and inner moral development.

[18] Sunnis: Muslims who follow the Prophet's tradition and the consensus of his companions, forming the majority of the Islamic world.

[19] The Pahlavi monarchy consisted of two kings:

Reza Shah Pahlavi, founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, focused on modernization, building a unified army, railways, modern schools, social dress reform, and the liberation of women from compulsory veiling.

Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi pursued industrial and economic development, modernization programs (such as the White Revolution), expansion of urban and educational infrastructure, and a strong foreign policy, becoming the most powerful figure in OPEC. Many Iranians have referred to the Pahlavi family as "the nation-building Pahlavi dynasty."

[20] **Dēnkard**: a collection of Zoroastrian religious and philosophical texts in Pahlavi that compiles doctrines, beliefs, and Zoroastrian history.

[21] **Mēnōg-ī Xrad**: a Zoroastrian Pahlavi text presenting dialogues between spirit and reason on the world, religion, ethics, and the afterlife.

[22] [22] Albert de Jong (b. 1955, Netherlands): a Dutch scholar specializing in Iranian religions and Late Antiquity, known for his research on Zoroastrianism, Avestan and Middle Persian texts, and the religious history of ancient Iran.

[23] Mary Boyce: a British scholar of Zoroastrian philosophy and ancient Iranian religions, author of foundational works on Zoroastrian history and texts.

[24] Al-Masʿūdī (*Murūj al-Dhahab*): a 10th-century CE historian and geographer from Baghdad, author of *Murūj al-Dhahab wa Maʿādin al-Jawhar* on Islamic and pre-Islamic civilizations. Some of his accounts are viewed skeptically by modern scholars.

[25] Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī: a major Iranian polymath of the 10th–11th centuries, specializing in mathematics, astronomy, geography, and the history of religions.

[26] Ibn al-Athīr: a 12th–13th-century Islamic historian and author of *Al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*. Some scholars question the accuracy of certain reports in his works, particularly those based on weak or late sources.

[27] Methodology of historical research: the principles and methods used to analyze historical sources in order to accurately understand the past.

[28] **Gathas (Gāhān)**: a collection of 177 Zoroastrian religious hymns in Avestan, attributed to Zarathustra, containing ethical and cosmological praise.

[29] **Yasna**: one of the main sections of the Avesta, consisting of ritual ceremonies and prayers, including the Gathas.

[30] **Vendidad** (or Book of the Magi): a part of the Avesta containing purity laws, religious rituals, and narratives about combating Angra Mainyu and forces of evil.

Resources

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Some explanations aligned with the text

• **For the concept of "biased translation":**
Lefevere (1992); Hermans (1999)
• **For critiques of the translation of *"wa-ḍribūhunna"*:**
Ali (2006); Chaudhry (2014); Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*
• **For the semantic shift of *"kāfir"*:**
Izutsu (1966); Hallaq (2013)
• **For adding interpretive qualifiers in translation:**
Lawrence (2006); Abdel Haleem (2004)

• **For *"mā malakat aymānukum"*:**
Ali (2010); Lewis (1990)
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